

Connecticut General Assembly
Appropriations Subcommittee on Elementary & Secondary Education
Public Hearing
February 21, 2017

Thank you, Senator Catherine Osten, Senator Paul Formica, Representative Toni Walker, and members of the Committee for giving me the opportunity to speak. My name is Elizabeth Bergman, I am a resident of Enfield, and I am here to advocate for sustainable funding for Connecticut's magnet schools.

Two years ago, I spoke before this committee on behalf of Connecticut's magnet schools. I spoke about my experience as a parent: my hope for my children to be a part of a community of learners, a place where everyone at the school believes in and carries out its mission. I spoke about my wish for my children to receive their education in a place where they would have opportunities to work and grow with children of many different backgrounds, a place where my children would benefit from sharing experiences with a group of people who reflect the diversity that exists in our society. I described how my family felt as though we had "won the educational lottery" when we received the news that my son, my oldest child, would be attending kindergarten at CREC Discovery Academy. I shared how, two and a half years in to my son's public school experience, we felt as though we had not only found the educational community of our dreams—a place where William is challenged to maximize his potential every day and given the support he needs to succeed—we had also found a family.

Today I speak as a parent of two Discovery Academy students. William now attends fourth grade, and my daughter Katie is a member of one of the preK classes. In addition, I am fortunate enough to work at Discovery Academy as an associate instructor. I am grateful to be able to advocate for Connecticut's magnet schools from the perspectives of both a parent and a teacher.

In the two years since I last testified, significant changes have occurred in our world. I am more concerned today with the wellbeing of our children, and I am worried about the future of our schools and the impact this will have on our communities. I have given a lot of thought, and done a fair amount of reading, as to what can be done to increase respect, integrity, and kindness among us, and the idea that resonates most with me is this: connecting with each other. Fostering connections with one another, getting to know one another as fellow human beings, helps us to build empathy for one another, and with empathy, we are able

to better understand each other's feelings and to allow that knowledge to inform our actions.

Magnet schools provide an excellent environment for children and adults to develop relationships with people of different backgrounds. Both my son and my daughter have formed friendships with wonderful children who share their interests, children they would never have met had we decided for them to attend our neighborhood school. As a parent, I believe that these friendships are helping my children to develop empathy as they build their understanding of the world around them. And as a member of the school staff, I feel blessed to be able to connect with students and families within our school community as a teacher. Every day, I am amazed by our students. They have so much to contribute, and I feel very fortunate to work with them. Our students are informing my teaching and my perspective of the world.

Following the presidential election, I came across an interview with Kathy Cramer, a political science professor at the University of Wisconsin—Madison. At the conclusion of the interview, Professor Cramer discusses the importance of “spending time with people from a different walk of life” as a means of achieving empathy. She states, “There’s nothing like it. You can’t achieve it through online communication. You can’t achieve it though having good intentions. It’s the act of being with other people that establishes the sense that we actually are all in this together.” Magnet schools allow this to happen. They bring us together and provide us with opportunities to learn about, learn from, and learn with each other. They offer the possibility for us to participate in shared experiences. Magnet schools have the potential to help us increase our empathy for each other and, subsequently, to improve the world for each other. Please continue to support magnet schools for Connecticut families. Magnet schools are an investment that can yield benefits for us all.

Respectfully submitted,
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